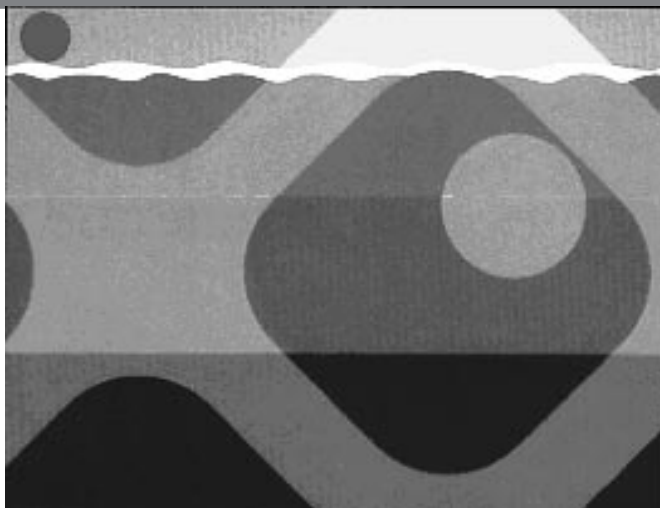


Our Living Oceans

REPORT ON THE STATUS OF U.S. LIVING MARINE RESOURCES

1995



February 1996

NOAA Tech. Memo. NMFS-F/SPO-19

**U.S. Department
of Commerce**

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Commemorating 125 Years of Federal Fisheries Science

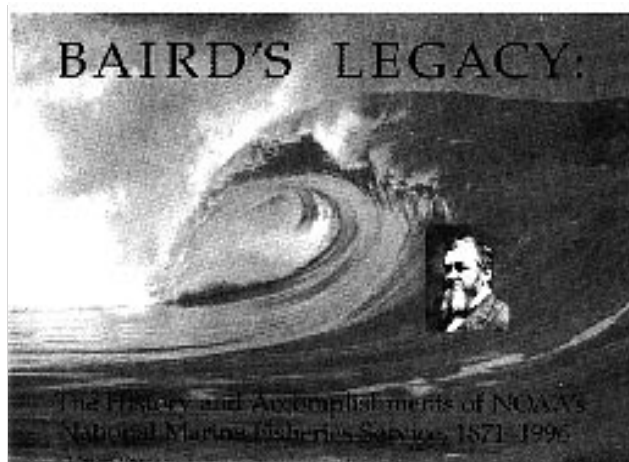
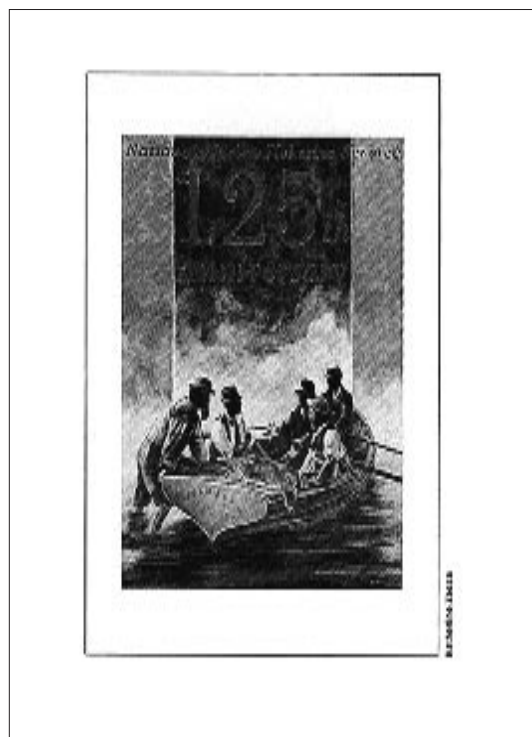
During 1996, the National Marine Fisheries Service celebrates its 125th anniversary as the Nation's oldest natural resource conservation agency. In 1871, the United States Congress established the Commission of Fish and Fisheries. As an independent agency, the Commission's charge was to protect, manage, and restore the country's fisheries through scientific research.

In time, a new name was accorded the agency reflecting the growth in its responsibilities—the United States Bureau of Fisheries—and in 1903, a new home in the Department of Commerce and Labor. Following a 1939 reorganization into the Interior Department, the agency merged with the Biological Survey to become part of a new Fish and Wildlife Service in 1940. By 1956, the agency was again operating within the Interior Department as a distinct organization—the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries. The agency's last move came in 1970 when, under Executive Order 11564, the Bureau was renamed the National Marine Fisheries Service and placed in the newly created National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

From its inception, the Service has contributed broad scientific advances in marine biology, fisheries science, and oceanography. The vision of its first Commissioner, Spencer F. Baird, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution and an eminent zoologist of

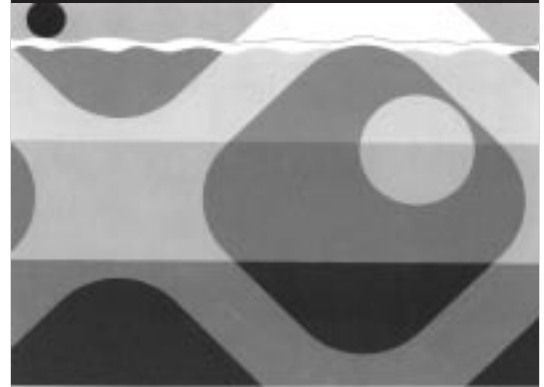
his time, is honored by a continuing commitment to scientific excellence and federal stewardship.

As part of the 125th anniversary celebration, the Service's Scientific Publications Office has published a chronicle of the agency's activities—"Baird's Legacy: The History and Accomplishments of NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service, 1871-1996." □



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Our Living Oceans

1995

Our Living Oceans 1995 (OLO '95) is the fourth volume in a recent series of reviews on the status of U.S. living marine resources. Earlier editions of "Our Living Oceans" were published for the years 1991, 1992, and 1993. This volume also inaugurates a biennial reporting schedule; this schedule better captures the often extended period of time required to observe and document changes in the marine environment. The OLO series cover resources from five large geographical regions of the United States: Northeast, Southeast (including the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean), Alaska, Pacific coast, and the far western Pacific oceanic waters.

The stewardship of the Nation's living marine resources largely is entrusted to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (hereafter referred to as NOAA Fisheries), an agency of the Department of Commerce. NOAA Fisheries carries out this responsibility in partnership with eight regional fishery management councils, three interstate marine fishery commissions, all coastal states, and many international marine science and management organizations.

OLO '95 focuses on the principal fishery resources, marine mammals, and sea turtles that are under the management jurisdiction of NOAA Fisheries. It also summarizes the status of many nearshore species which are managed primarily by the coastal states. This report provides the estimates of fishery stock productivity and status of the resources through 1994. The assessments are drawn from results of field surveys, biological and physical studies, and independent monitoring of the recreational, subsistence and commercial fisheries. The level of fishery utilization and management of the resources are summarized. Also, important local and national issues, as well as the near-term outlook, are highlighted.

As with the previous editions of "Our Living Oceans," the information provided here is the result of the collective efforts of NOAA Fisheries staff from around the country. The principal contributors to this report are listed in Appendix 1. □

Preface

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The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service began as the U.S. Commission of Fish and Fisheries in 1871. This year, the Service celebrates its 125th anniversary of scientific endeavor and fisheries management. NOAA Fisheries is entrusted with the conservation and management of fish, shellfish, sea turtle, marine mammal, and other resources that live in U.S. waters. We work on behalf of the American public to manage and sustain the Nation's living marine resources and their habitats.

NOAA Fisheries advocates sustainable use of living marine resources. These uses include commercial, subsistence and recreational fishing, observation, and research. We support maximizing benefits to the Nation, without compromising the coexistence of species and their habitats. We strive to balance competing public needs and interests in the use and enjoyment of our ocean's resources.

NOAA Fisheries is responsible for ensuring that the best scientific information is used in management decisions. Our data collection and research are conducted over a broad range of scientific disciplines, including the natural and social sciences. Our scientists conduct research that contributes to the knowledge of fisheries science and the design of innovative management approaches. These efforts are augmented by improvements in the agency's monitoring and enforcement capabilities.

NOAA Fisheries supports the open exchange of information. Effective communication is essential to the development and support of successful resource management and conservation policies. We believe that an informed public can help us reach attainable and measurable objectives. This report is an example of our continuing efforts to inform the American people of our science-based findings.

NOAA Fisheries is fundamentally dedicated to maintaining the Nation's marine heritage by ensuring the existence of productive, diverse, and healthy ocean ecosystems. Our long history has given us the experience and expertise to make progress towards resolving living marine resource issues. This report shows the many areas where improvement is needed. We must reverse the path to overfishing, rebuild and maintain sustainable fisheries, improve economic performance, and strengthen the conservation of protected species and the marine habitat.

As Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, I will focus on our performance in improving the management of U.S. living marine resources through better understanding of ocean science, careful reviews of resource status, improved communications with our constituents, and a more streamlined and effective NOAA Fisheries.

This report provides an overview of the Nation's living marine resources and illustrates the successes and shortcomings in our stewardship of them. It highlights the progress we have made, and more importantly, the significant issues which we must face over the coming years. □

Rolland A. Schmitt

Assistant Administrator
for Fisheries
National Oceanic and
Atmospheric Administration

February 1996



Foreword

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